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Conference Abstract

Who Has Time for Biological Collections Data Quality Feedback? Maybe a Community Can Help

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Abstract

At an institution without a permanent collections manager or curators, who has time to publish data or research issues on that data? Collections with little or no institutional support often benefit from passionate volunteers who continually seek ways to keep them relevant. The University of Texas at El Paso Biodiversity Collections (UTEP-BC) has been cared for in this manner by a small group of dedicated faculty and emeritus curators who have managed with no budget to care for the specimens, perform and publish research about them, and publish a good portion of the collections data. An IMLS grant allowed these dedicated volunteers to hire a Collections Manager who would migrate the already published data from the collections and add unpublished specimen records from the in-house developed FileMaker Pro database to a new collection management system (Arctos) that would allow for better records management and ease of publication. Arctos is a publicly searchable web-based system, but most collections also see the benefit of participation with biodiversity data aggregators such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), iDigBio, and a multitude of discipline-specific aggregators. Publication of biodiversity data to aggregators is loaded with hidden pathways, acronyms, and tech-speak with which a curator, registrar, or collections manager may not be familiar. After navigating the process to publish the data the reward is feedback! Now data can be improved, and everyone wins, right? In the case of UTEP-BC data, the feedback sits idle as the requirements of the grant under which the Collection Manager was hired take precedence.

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It will likely remain buried until long after the grant has run its course. Fortunately, the selection of Arctos as a collection management system allowed the UTEP-BC Collection Manager to confer with others publishing biodiversity data to the data aggregators. Members of the Arctos Community have carried on multiple conversations about publishing to aggregators and how to handle the resulting data quality flags. These conversations provide a synthesis of the challenges experienced by collections in over 20 institutions when publishing biodiversity data to aggregators and responding (or not) to their data quality flags. This presentation will cover the experiences and concerns of one Collection Manager as well as those of the Arctos Community related to publishing data to aggregators, deciphering their data quality flags, and development of appropriate responses to those flags.

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